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ABSTRACT

Project Look Sharp is an initiative to promote and support the integration of media literacy into classroom curricula at all grade levels and instructional areas, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of media literacy education in the schools. It provides the following 12 guidelines as basic principles for incorporating media literacy into any curriculum: use media to practice general observation, critical thinking, perspective-taking, and production skills; use media to stimulate interest in a new topic; identify ways in which students may be already familiar with a topic through media; use media as a standard pedagogical tool; identify erroneous beliefs about a topic fostered by media content; develop an awareness of issues of credibility and bias in the media; compare the ways different media present information about a topic; analyze the effect that specific media have had on a particular issue; use media to build and practice specific curricular skills; use media to express students' opinions and illustrate their understanding of the world; use media as an assessment tool; and use media to connect students to the community. Four or five examples are provided to illustrate each principle. (PM)

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PROJECT LOOK SHARP

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Basic Principles for Incorporating Media Literacy into Any Curriculum

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Providing support, education, and training to help teachers prepare students to survive in a media-saturated world

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PROJECT LOOK SHARP

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Incorporating Media Literacy into Any Curriculum: 12 Principles

Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, critically evaluate, and produce communication in a variety of forms. At Project Look Sharp we define "media" very broadly to include television, radio, books, magazines, newspapers, billboards, movies, recorded music, video games, and computer-assisted communication, such as the Internet.

Media literacy education began in the 1970s with an emphasis on *protection* (from the so-called "evil effects" of media) and *discrimination* (between so-called "good" and "bad" media content); most media literacy materials and initiatives were aimed at parents. Over the past 15 years there has been a shift toward an emphasis on media literacy as *empowerment* (stressing critical thinking and production skills); more materials are now aimed at schools and teachers. The empowerment model emphasizes the political, social, and economic implications of media messages and stresses the importance of using media effectively and wisely.

This booklet is designed for teachers and support staff at all grade levels who are interested in using media literacy in their classroom curricula. The principles are based on the concept of weaving media literacy training into the curriculum whenever and wherever possible throughout the school year. We feel this approach is much more effective than simply treating media literacy as a special, isolated topic and may better meet the needs of teachers who are already overwhelmed with the demands of a full curriculum.

The following 12 principles are general guidelines for thinking about ways to integrate media literacy into any curricular area. For each principle, media literacy can be incorporated through the use and analysis of existing media content (as illustration material, material to critique, etc.) and/or through media production (creating new messages using print, audio, video, or digital media). The activities listed for each principle are meant as examples only. Following the same general ideas, you may think of additional activities that meet the needs of your class or curricular area. We encourage you to share your ideas and experiences with us as you build media literacy into your classroom curriculum.

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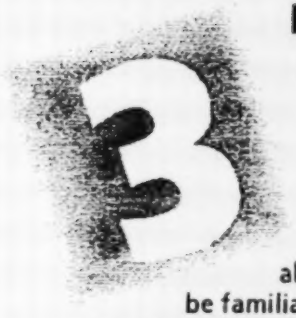
Use media to practice general observation, critical thinking, analysis, perspective-taking, and production skills by

- encouraging students to think critically about information presented in any media message (including the information from their textbooks or the popular media they use at home)
- pointing out ways in which media messages might be interpreted differently by people from different backgrounds or groups
- fostering observation and general memory skills by asking students to look for specific things when they view videos or read print material, and then asking them about those things afterward
- allowing students to go beyond the curricular issue at hand to identify and comment on incidental aspects of a media message (e.g., the characteristics of the people presenting the material, the techniques used to attract attention, and the ways in which advertising and product messages intrude into other types of media content)
- fostering creative skills through encouraging the production of media messages about a topic

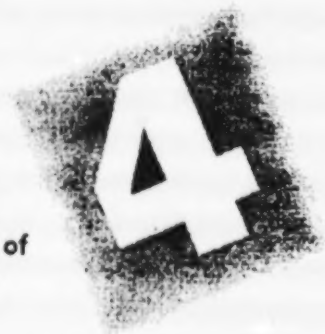
Use media to stimulate interest in a new topic by

- showing an exciting or familiar video clip or reading a short book or story (fiction or non-fiction) about the topic
- having students work in small groups to read, analyze, and discuss a controversial magazine or newspaper article about the topic
- using a short video, magazine illustration, or brief article to stimulate discussion, encouraging students to express what they already know or their opinion about a topic
- showing students how to search for information about the topic on the Internet
- encouraging students to plan and design a media product (a montage of pictures, a video, a newspaper or magazine report) about the topic for other students to view



Identify ways in which students may be already familiar with a topic through media by

- giving examples from popular media content to illustrate what students might already know about a topic or things they might be familiar with that relate to the topic
- drawing links between the way a topic is typically treated academically and how it might be used in popular media (e.g., written poetry vs. song lyrics or advertising jingles)
- clarifying the way specific terminology related to the topic might be used differently in an academic sense than it might be in the popular culture
- building on the intuitive knowledge students have gained from media about the content area (e.g., about story and character development, problem solving, terminology, rhyming)



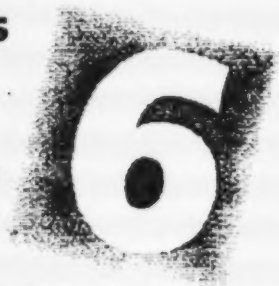
Use media as a standard pedagogical tool by

- providing information about the topic through a variety of media sources (books, newspaper/magazine articles, instructional videos, websites), comparing the usefulness of different media, and addressing conflicting information that may come from different sources
- using media to convey information more richly and effectively than would be possible with a standard classroom discussion or demonstration
- encouraging students to follow (and write about) current events reported in the media about a topic
- using media content as assigned homework (reading material, searching for information about a topic in newspapers or magazines, etc.)
- encouraging students to share information in class that they have gotten from various media sources (inside or outside of class)

Identify erroneous beliefs about a topic fostered by media content by

- analyzing media content that misrepresents a topic or presents false or misleading information about a topic
- identifying misleading ways in which data are presented in the media (citing statistics incorrectly, drawing false conclusions from data, presenting unclear figures and tables, etc.)
- identifying false beliefs held by students about a topic that may have come from fictional media content
- encouraging students to create their own false or misleading media messages (PSAs, commercials, digitally manipulated print advertisements, etc.) and then having them present the message and "debunk" it for the other students in the class

Develop an awareness of issues of credibility and bias in the media by



- teaching how to recognize the source (speaker) of a media message and the purpose of producing the message, and how that might influence the objective nature of information
- clarifying the distinction between fiction and nonfiction in different types of media reporting on a specific topic
- identifying ways to decide what are credible sources about this topic within different types of media (e.g., books, magazines/journals, the Internet)
- emphasizing the importance of getting information from many different sources and how to give weight to different pieces of information (e.g., if the information is based on research or other evidence vs. personal opinion)
- producing media messages about this topic, emphasizing ways in which bias can be introduced through the words and tone used to present the topic, sources of information used, what is selected to be presented and what is left out, etc.
- exploring how media messages reflect the identity of the creator or presenter of the message and how the same message might come across differently if it were presented or created by someone of a different background, age, race, gender, etc.

Compare the ways different media present information about a topic by

- contrasting ways in which information about a topic might be presented in a documentary, a TV news report, a newspaper article, an advertisement, or an educational children's program (what is emphasized, what is left out, what techniques are used to present the information, etc.)
- comparing the amount of time/space devoted to a topic in different media from the same time period (and discussing why the difference occurs)
- analyzing different conclusions that might be drawn by people exposed to information presented in one medium vs. another
- discussing the strengths of different media to best get across a particular message
- producing reports about the topic using different forms of media, or manipulating the same information and visuals to convey different messages

Analyze the effect that specific media have had on a particular issue or topic historically and/or across different cultures by

- discussing the role that the media have played (if any) in the history of this topic (i.e., ways in which the media have changed the nature of this issue or topic)
- discussing how people of earlier generations might have learned about this topic, what sources of information were available to them compared with sources available to us now, and what difference that would make in people's lives
- exploring the level of knowledge about a topic in different cultures and how that knowledge is influenced by the media available
- identifying media forms that are dominant or available in other cultures that may be seldom used in the United States, and vice versa

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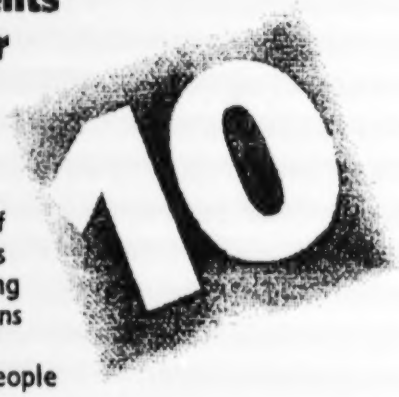
Use media to build and practice specific curricular skills by

- using print media (books, newspapers, magazines) to practice reading and comprehension skills
- substituting excerpts from existing media content for standard story problems or practice examples (e.g., to practice math skills, to correct grammar or spelling, to identify adjectives or adverbs)
- using media production to practice specific skills (e.g., grammar, poetry, math used in timing and proportions of media messages, scientific principles involved in calculating size, distance, and lighting)
- preparing examples for practicing skills that include media literacy information (e.g., comparing the lengths of news stories about different topics, computing the Nielsen ratings for different shows, analyzing the ways in which two products are described in advertisements)
- fostering computer skills by encouraging students to search for information on the Internet, develop multimedia projects, and use computers to present information about a topic

Use media to express students' opinions and illustrate their understanding of the world by



- encouraging students to analyze media messages for distortions and bias issues of particular interest to them (e.g., messages about sex and gender, messages promoting harmful behaviors, race and age distortions in the "media world" compared with the real world, and advertising targeted to people their age)
- encouraging students to express their feelings and knowledge through media messages that they produce
- encouraging thoughtful critiques of various media productions
- promoting discussion of different points of view about popular media articles and productions

Use media as an assessment tool by

- having students summarize their knowledge about a topic in a final report, employing other forms of media beyond the standard written report (e.g., computer-illustrated reports, audio or video productions, photographic illustrations)
- encouraging students to work in groups to illustrate their understanding of a topic by creating mock media productions (e.g., newspapers, advertisements, news reports, live or videotaped skits)
- presenting, at the end of a unit, a media message (e.g., from a newspaper, magazine, or video) that contains false information about the topic and seeing if students can identify what is correct and what is incorrect in the message

Use media to connect students to the community and work toward positive change by

- finding collaborative possibilities for projects with community institutions (museums, libraries, galleries, etc.) that may involve students analyzing or creating media messages
- having students contact community service agencies related to the curricular area and offer their assistance with production skills (photography, video, design and layout, or computer skills) to help with agency projects
- encouraging older students to teach production techniques or media literacy principles to younger students in the same school
- using media forums (such as local community access TV, newspapers, and magazines) to communicate messages or share research projects about the topic

About Project Look Sharp

Project Look Sharp is an initiative to promote and support the integration of media literacy into classroom curricula at all grade levels and instructional areas, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of media literacy education in the schools. This curriculum-driven initiative works directly with teachers to reach students and aims to foster a spirit of collaboration among educators using media literacy. Project Look Sharp provides strategies, advice, and materials for media literacy instruction and acts as a liaison between local teachers and the media literacy field at large.

Mission Statement

The daily demands of life in the "Information Age" require that students be aware of the influence of media on the political process and on the power dynamics and social relations among the diverse populations that compose the global community. The sheer volume and accessibility of available information demand that students at all grade levels be able to filter that information effectively and use media wisely—in other words, become media literate.

Media literacy is easily integrated into existing curricula at all grade levels and is an effective tool for exploring approaches to education that are interdisciplinary and recognize different learning styles. Media literacy encourages participatory citizenship by helping students to appreciate multiple perspectives and to analyze information for greater understanding.

Goals of Project Look Sharp

- To provide teachers with ongoing pre-service and in-service training and mentoring in media education
- To develop a library of media literacy materials for use by public school teachers and other professionals working with children
- To work with teachers to create new or revised teaching materials and pedagogical strategies that incorporate media literacy and enhance classroom practice
- To develop and test tools for evaluating the effectiveness of media literacy education
- To promote and support media literacy education at the community, state, and national levels
- To develop a model for including media literacy in the school curriculum at all grade levels and in all instructional areas, and to show how media literacy can help teachers address new learning standards

General Media Literacy Practices

When teachers are using instructional videos or films in the classroom, we recommend showing short segments (rather than entire films without interruption) and leaving the lights on to facilitate active discussion. Pause the video frequently to ask questions, clarify terms and concepts, or elaborate on a point made during the film. If possible, show short segments on the same topic from several different sources, pointing out omissions and biases when appropriate.

When engaging in critical analysis of any media message, encourage students to consider the following questions:

1. Who is "speaking" and what is their purpose? (Who produced or sponsored the message?)
2. Who is the target audience, and how is the message specifically tailored to them?
3. What techniques are used to attract attention?
4. What values and lifestyles are promoted? (What is communicated as good to be, or have, or do? What is not good to be, or have, or do?)
5. What is implied without being specifically stated (especially about the credibility of the message)?
6. What is left out of this message that might be important to know?

Project Look Sharp Personnel

Cyndy Scheibe, the project director, holds a doctoral degree in developmental psychology from Cornell University and is an associate professor of psychology at Ithaca College. She is also the director of the Center for Research on the Effects of Television and has been conducting research on the effects of television on children for nearly 20 years.

Eileen Jacobs is our administrative assistant.

Eric Miller, resources and publications, is also an elementary school teacher in the Ithaca City School District.

Jeff Spence, audiovisual production, also teaches English and video production at Ithaca High School.

Chris Sperry, training and curriculum development, also teaches social studies and media sociology at the Alternative Community School.

In addition to our office staff, the project is guided by many volunteers, including college and public school faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as media literacy experts.

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Workshops

Teachers, school librarians, and others working with children in an educational setting can participate in workshops designed to meet the specific needs of the group involved. We emphasize either critical analysis of media messages or media production techniques. The workshops can be curriculum-specific (e.g., integrating media literacy into a math or science curriculum), or they can focus on a particular topic (e.g., multiculturalism, gender issues, violence).

Newsletters

Especially designed for K–12 teachers, each newsletter contains general information and specific ideas for using media literacy in the classroom.

Media Literacy Resource Library

Project Look Sharp has developed an extensive library of media literacy materials and also provides access to a large archive of television programs and commercials dating back to the early 1980s. Staff members in participating school districts may borrow materials.

Mentoring and Curriculum Development

Project Look Sharp offers mentoring to teachers interested in incorporating media literacy into specific curricular areas, through one-on-one coaching and through an e-mail discussion list for classroom teachers. We also have an extensive database of ideas linking media literacy to specific grades and curricular areas.

Research and Assessment

We have begun developing specific assessment protocols for evaluating the effectiveness of media literacy education. We also work directly with teachers to develop authentic assessment tools for individual curricula that are linked to media literacy.

Speakers Bureau

Professor Cyndy Scheibe, the Project Look Sharp project director, is a nationally recognized speaker and an expert on media effects and media literacy. She and other members of Project Look Sharp are available for all types of talks, keynote addresses, and lectures.

Website: www.ithaca.edu/looksharp

The Project Look Sharp website contains general information about the project, listings from the resource library, descriptions of current workshops, and excerpts from back issues of newsletters, as well as links to other media literacy websites.

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